Annotated Bibliographies

Definitions

A bibliography is a list of sources (books, journals, Web sites, periodicals, etc.) one has used for researching a topic. Bibliographies are sometimes called "References" or "Works Cited" depending on the style format you are using. A bibliography usually just includes the bibliographic information (i.e., the author, title, publisher, etc.).

An annotation is a summary and/or evaluation. Therefore, an annotated bibliography includes a summary and/or evaluation of each of the sources. Depending on your project or the assignment, your annotations may do one or more of the following.

- Summarize: Some annotations merely summarize the source. What are the main arguments? What is the point of this book or article? What topics are covered? If someone asked what this article/book is about, what would you say? The length of your annotations will determine how detailed your summary is.

  For more help, see our handout on paraphrasing sources.

- Assess: After summarizing a source, it may be helpful to evaluate it. Is it a useful source? How does it compare with other sources in your bibliography? Is the information reliable? Is this source biased or objective? What is the goal of this source?

  For more help, see our handouts on evaluating resources.

- Reflect: Once you've summarized and assessed a source, you need to ask how it fits into your research. Was this source helpful to you? How does it help you shape your argument? How can you use this source in your research project? Has it changed how you think about your topic?
Your annotated bibliography may include some of these, all of these, or even others. If you're doing this for a class, you should get specific guidelines from your instructor.

Why should I write an annotated bibliography?

To learn about your topic: Writing an annotated bibliography is excellent preparation for a research project. Just collecting sources for a bibliography is useful, but when you have to write annotations for each source, you're forced to read each source more carefully. You begin to read more critically instead of just collecting information. At the professional level, annotated bibliographies allow you to see what has been done in the literature and where your own research or scholarship can fit. To help you formulate a thesis: Every good research paper is an argument. The purpose of research is to state and support a thesis. So a very important part of research is developing a thesis that is debatable, interesting, and current. Writing an annotated bibliography can help you gain a good perspective on what is being said about your topic. By reading and responding to a variety of sources on a topic, you'll start to see what the issues are, what people are arguing about, and you'll then be able to develop your own point of view.

To help other researchers: Extensive and scholarly annotated bibliographies are sometimes published. They provide a comprehensive overview of everything important that has been and is being said about that topic. You may not ever get your annotated bibliography published, but as a researcher, you might want to look for one that has been published about your topic.

Format

The format of an annotated bibliography can vary, so if you're doing one for a class, it's important to ask for specific guidelines.

The bibliographic information: Generally, though, the bibliographic information of the source (the title, author, publisher, date, etc.) is written in either MLA or APA format. For more help with formatting, see our MLA handout. For APA, go here: APA handout.

The annotations: The annotations for each source are written in paragraph form. The lengths of the annotations can vary significantly from a couple of sentences to a couple of pages. The length will depend on the purpose. If you're just writing summaries of your sources, the annotations may not be very long. However, if you are writing an extensive analysis of each source, you'll need more space.

You can focus your annotations for your own needs. A few sentences of general summary followed by several sentences of how you can fit the work into your larger paper or project can serve you well when you go to draft.

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Summary:

This handout provides information about annotated bibliographies in MLA, APA, and CMS.
Sample MLA Annotation


Lamott's book offers honest advice on the nature of a writing life, complete with its insecurities and failures. Taking a humorous approach to the realities of being a writer, the chapters in Lamott's book are wry and anecdotal and offer advice on everything from plot development to jealousy, from perfectionism to struggling with one's own internal critic. In the process, Lamott includes writing exercises designed to be both productive and fun.

Lamott offers sane advice for those struggling with the anxieties of writing, but her main project seems to be offering the reader a reality check regarding writing, publishing, and struggling with one's own imperfect humanity in the process. Rather than a practical handbook to producing and/or publishing, this text is indispensable because of its honest perspective, its down-to-earth humor, and its encouraging approach.

Chapters in this text could easily be included in the curriculum for a writing class. Several of the chapters in Part 1 address the writing process and would serve to generate discussion on students' own drafting and revising processes. Some of the writing exercises would also be appropriate for generating classroom writing exercises. Students should find Lamott's style both engaging and enjoyable.


Ken Battle draws on a close study of government documents, as well as his own research as an extensively-published policy analyst, to explain Canadian child benefit programs. He outlines some fundamental assumptions supporting the belief that all society members should contribute to the upbringing of children. His comparison of child poverty rates in a number of countries is a useful wake-up to anyone assuming Canadian society is doing a good job of protecting children. Battle pays particular attention to the National Child Benefit (NCB), arguing that it did not deserve to be criticized by politicians and journalists. He outlines the NCB’s development, costs, and benefits, and laments that the Conservative government scaled it back in favor of the inferior Universal Child Care Benefit (UCCB). However, he relies too heavily on his own work; he is the sole or primary author of almost half the sources in his bibliography. He could make this work stronger by drawing from others' perspectives and analyses. However, Battle does offer a valuable source for this essay, because the chapter provides a concise overview of government-funded assistance currently available to parents. This offers context for analyzing the scope and financial reality of child poverty in Canada.
Abolishing Academic Tracking in Schools

Guggenheim, Davis, director. *Waiting for Superman.* Paramount. 2010

Davis Guggenheim makes a strong statement about the need for education reform in his 2010 documentary film *Waiting for Superman.* The film points out many flaws in American public schools, such as lack of resources, the inability to fire bad teachers, overcrowding, and outdated teaching methodologies. In low-income neighborhoods where parents cannot afford expensive private schools, children have no choice but to attend failing public schools. Charter schools are a no-cost alternative for higher-quality education, but the demand is so great that students must enter a lottery in order to win a spot, and most do get to attend. The title “Waiting for Superman” refers to the fact that reforming education is so difficult that it seems like only a superhero could save our failing schools.

This is a credible source because the film won several awards and has been endorsed by proponents of education reform. The filmmaker included interviews with several experts in the field, including Geoffrey Canada, founder of the Harlem Success Academy, and Michelle Rhee, former chancellor of the Washington, DC public schools. It is biased because it only shows the negative aspects of public schools. The goal of this source is to inform viewers that American students are receiving a poor education and to persuade viewers to take action to reform our education system.

*Waiting for Superman* will be useful for my research paper on academic tracking because of the example of Emily, an eighth-grade student who was featured in the film. Unlike the rest of the kids in the film who are from low-income families, Emily lives in a wealthy suburb with good schools. But her parents still do not want her to attend their public high school because of tracking. They fear that Emily will be placed in low-level classes which will hinder her academic success and stop her from getting into college. They want Emily to attend a charter school that does not track their students by ability. Instead they hold all of their students to the same high standard and provide extra help to anyone who needs it. I will use this source to show that some parents and students disagree with academic tracking and believe that they would get a better education in a school that does not sort their students into low-level and high-level classes.
**IS THIS A GOOD SOURCE FOR MY RESEARCH ASSIGNMENT?**

Evaluate it! The more items you can check off from the first column, the better!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GREAT</th>
<th>GOOD</th>
<th>MAYBE</th>
<th>BAD</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Authorship</strong></td>
<td><strong>Author(s) are identified, have credentials that can be verified, and have expertise in the subject area.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Author(s) are identified and have credentials that can be verified.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Author(s) are identified but credentials cannot be verified or are not related to the subject area.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Publisher</strong></td>
<td><strong>Publisher is reputable, i.e. a well-known academic press or is publishing an academic journal.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Publisher is reputable commercially but perhaps not academically such as publishing a trade journal.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Publisher is known but is not a respected academic or commercial press.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Currency</strong></td>
<td><strong>The source is recent (within past 3-5 years) and is relevant to the topic or subject.</strong></td>
<td><strong>The source is 5-10 years old but has historical value—is considered a classic article on the subject material.</strong></td>
<td><strong>The source is more than 10 years old and has little historical value or relevance to the topic or subject.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>References</strong></td>
<td><strong>A mix of sources from books and scholarly articles are fully cited in the reference page(s).</strong></td>
<td><strong>Some scholarly sources are cited in the reference page(s) along with non-scholarly or web based sources.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Few sources are cited in the reference page(s) or mostly non-scholarly sources are cited.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Writing</strong></td>
<td><strong>Written for a college level audience.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Written for a professional or non-academic audience.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Written for children or has no depth.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Bias</strong></td>
<td><strong>Issues are examined fairly using multiple perspectives and the writing is based upon facts and research rather than opinions.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Issues are examined but mostly from one side. The source is persuasive and well researched.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Arguments about the issue(s) are persuasive but not well supported. The language may express a clear preference for one side of an issue.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Relevance</strong></td>
<td><strong>The information directly supports your topic and is very useful.</strong></td>
<td><strong>The information may not directly support your topic but is useful for background information.</strong></td>
<td><strong>The information has some relation to your topic but is not very useful.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>The information has little to no relationship to your topic and is not useful.</strong></td>
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